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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #03742-86
11 August 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM:
Acting Assistant NIO for Europe

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SUBJECT: Your Meeting with Ambassador-Designate Niemczyk

Czechoslovakia: Marking Time, But for How Long?

1. Overview. Since the 1968 invasion, Czechoslovakia has been a grey place, notable chiefly for its regime's slavish loyalty to Moscow, harsh internal repression, and almost compulsive avoidance of domestic innovation. The population at large has remained generally quiescent and passive, pursuing private pleasures (and enjoying relatively high living standards) rather than public protests. But the increasing likelihood of change in the top leadership, and perhaps in socio-economic policy as well, suggests that Czechoslovakia may become considerably more interesting over the next two to three years.

2. The Czechoslovak Leadership. The top leadership in Prague is virtually the same as that which was installed after the 1968 invasion; it has remained in precarious balance between unalloyed hard-liners such as Vasil Bilak and a rather more moderate group around Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal. Presided over (but not led) by the increasingly enfeebled Gustav Husak, the leadership has been virtually immobilized by internal divisions. There has been not a single policy shift of any significance in fifteen years.

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3. Succession Scenarios and the Soviet Factor. The immobility of the top leadership cannot last much longer, if only for biological reasons. Though in reasonably good health, Husak is in his mid-seventies and has deteriorating eyesight; his departure from the top leadership would almost surely upset its fragile balance of forces--much as Brezhnev's did in the Soviet Politburo.

- Husak's political health is also in doubt. A Brezhnev protege clearly out of step with the new Gorbachev team, Husak is probably viewed in Moscow as a loyal comrade who has now outlived his utility.
- Husak's eventual departure may also open up long-suppressed policy debates, with potentially significant consequences. Moscow's vital interest--and likely direct involvement--is obvious.

4. Economic Policy. The leadership has already been put on notice by Moscow to improve economic performance, so as to deliver more and better technology at lower cost. For now the pressure appears to be at a low level, and the Czechoslovak response has been confined to timid calls for improved management and planning. Any move toward economic reform--the dog that never barks in Husak's Czechoslovakia--will probably have to await a reshuffling of the top leadership.

5. Foreign Policy. There has been similar pressure from Moscow for more active Czechoslovak support of Soviet diplomatic initiatives. Judging from Moscow's present priorities, we expect some movement--probably slight--toward improved bilateral relations with Czechoslovakia's West European neighbors, particularly the West Germans. (Ongoing security discussions with the SPD are likely to continue, however.)

6. Human Rights and Dissent. Despite some signs that repression may have eased, Czechoslovakia's human rights record remains among the worst in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Charter 77 continues to function under impossible conditions and has begun to move beyond human rights issues to comment on broader political and social concerns. Samizdat and other unofficial publications have grown markedly, with full scale underground publishing houses producing major historical and literary series.

7. Czechs and Slovaks. Lingering bitterness between the two nations persists, but at a much lower level of intensity. The revised federal constitution of 1969--the sole reform to have survived from the Prague Spring--has defused many national antagonisms, which are in any case more pronounced among emigre communities than within Czechoslovakia.

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